

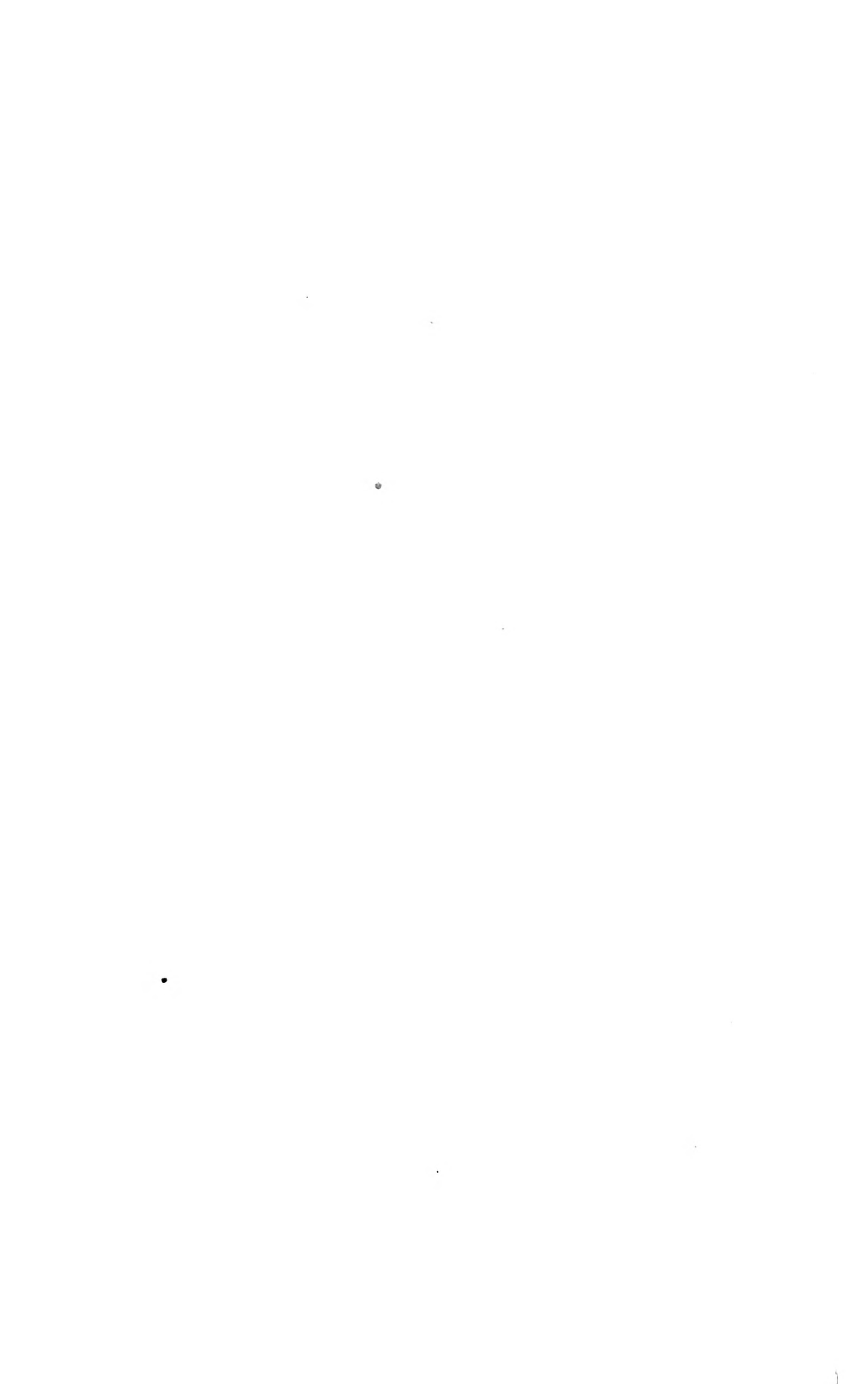
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Class E 445

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SPEECH

OF

MR. SLADE, OF VERMONT,

ON

THE SUBJECT OF THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY

AND

THE SLAVE TRADE

WITHIN

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

DECEMBER 23, 1835.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER OFFICE.

1836.

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SPEECH.

The question being that depending on the motion of Mr. PATTON, for reconsideration of the vote referring a petition to abolish Slavery and the Slave trade within the District of Columbia, to the Committee on the District—

Mr. SLADE said, he had been charged by a large and respectable portion of his constituents with the duty of presenting memorials of similar import to that under discussion; and for that reason, if for no other, he felt bound to ask the indulgence of the House to a few remarks.

He approached the subject, he said, with an oppressive sense of its magnitude, and, knowing its exciting character, of the great danger of being betrayed, in the progress of its discussion, into a state of feeling, unsuited to the place and the occasion. It was a subject on which he, as well as his constituents, felt most deeply; and he could neither represent their feelings, nor express his own, without a plainness and directness which *might* give offence. He begged gentlemen to believe, however, that he should say nothing intended to give the slightest personal offence to any; though he should, without fear of any, vindicate the petitioners, and assert the claims of those in whose behalf they plead. He regretted to hear the memorialists spoken of in debate as intruders, and their respectful petitions upon a subject of great national importance treated as a vexatious intermeddling with concerns in which they have no interest. Gentlemen must have patience. These petitioners, as far as he was acquainted with them, were among the most intelligent and respectable of the community in which they reside; while the subject of their petitions was one of which it well became them to speak, and the Congress of the United States to hear.

The great purpose, said Mr. S., of most of those who have hitherto spoken upon this subject seems to be to *get rid of* the petitions. The gentleman from New York (Mr. BEARDSLEY) wishes to have them all laid on the table, as fast as presented, and "nailed" there; and yet he is exceedingly regardful of the "sacred right of petitioning," which must, on no account whatever, be impaired! The gentlemen from South Carolina (Messrs. HAMMOND, PICKENS, and THOMPSON) are more consistent. They profess to regard the petitions as disrespectful, and the petitioners as officious meddlers with that which does not concern them. They, therefore, would have the petitions rejected. There is, in this, the merit, at least, of consistency, and the gentlemen have my thanks for evincing a disposition to meet the question fairly. Another gentleman, my honorable friend from Massachusetts, (Mr. ADAMS,) would have the petitions committed to the Committee on the District of Columbia; in other words, to use his own significant, and, in this case, appropriate language—to have them consigned to the "family vault of all the Capulets;" and yet he, too, is jealous of the "sacred right" of petition! The sacred right of petition!—that is to say, the "sacred right" of being "nailed to the table," by the gentleman from New York, or the "sacred right" of being gathered by the gentleman from Massachusetts into the "family vault of all the Capulets!"

Sir, the petitioners well understand the nature of both these rights. The last they have long enjoyed, and desire

to enjoy it no longer. They want the *action* of Congress on the subject, which, judging from the past, they are sure not to have, if it is to depend upon the decisive action of the Committee on the District of Columbia. I intend no disrespect to that committee. To continue to do what has been done—that is, to do *nothing*, would follow of course a commitment to them, with an express understanding that the petitions were consigned to the tomb, without the hope of a resurrection.

I, sir, said Mr. S., am in favor of the prayer of the petitioners. I believe that Congress has a right to legislate on the subject, and that the time has come when it ought to legislate. Something has been suggested with regard to *political* objects connected with the presenting of these petitions. Sir, I have no such object in view. I have no such purpose exists in my mind. They are moved by a spirit the mingling of any considerable amount of political considerations may tend to divert attention from the real nature of the subject.

Gentlemen, I regret to say, seem willing to make the real object of the petitioners, the *abolitionists*, to the end that the odium which has been attached to their measures for effecting the abolition of slavery in the States may be transferred to the exercise of an acknowledged right of asking Congress to abolish it in this District. But what do the petitioners ask at our hands? Why, sir, simply that measures may be taken to put an end to slavery *here*, and especially that here, where the flag of freedom floats over the Capitol of this great Republic, and where the authority of that Republic is supreme, the trade in human flesh may be abolished. These are the questions which gentlemen are called on to meet, but which they do not meet, either by calling the petitioners "ignorant fanatics," or denouncing them as "murderers and incendiaries." If, in the fervor of their philanthropy, any have adopted measures of more than doubtful expediency, for the purpose of acting on the public sentiment in the slave States, in favor of immediate emancipation, it surely furnishes no reason why we should obstinately shut our eyes to the evils which are within our control, and which call loudly for our immediate attention.

I have said, sir, that I am in favor of the prayer of the petitioners. Let me not be misunderstood. The *abolition* of slavery which I would advocate, is a gradual one. I believe the immediate and unqualified abolition of slavery to be inconsistent with a just regard, both to the interests of the community, and the highest welfare of the slave. The philanthropy which aims at such an abolition, whatever I may think of its purity, I cannot commend for its intelligence or discretion. But though I would have abolition advance by a gradual progress towards its final consummation, I would have the work begin immediately. Sir, I cannot stand here as a freeman, and the Representative of freemen, without declaring, in the face of this House and of the world, that the right to hold men as goods and chattels, subject to sale and transfer, at the will of a master, should cease and be discontinued instantly and forever.

But while I say this, I would not render worse the condition of the slave, by conferring upon him rights which he is not fitted to enjoy, and which would become to him a

curse rather than a blessing. I would not, at once, entirely emancipate him from the control of his master. But it should not be, as now, an arbitrary, unqualified control. For that control I would substitute the authority of law, which should be SUPREME. In saying this, sir, I do but carry out a principle which has long been dear to me as an Anti-mason. I have maintained, and still maintain, and shall continue to maintain, as a cardinal principle in my political creed, that, in opposition to all individual, and all associated, self-constituted authority, THE LAWS should be maintained in full and uncontrolled supremacy. There is no being, entitled to the appellation of *man*, who should not find shelter under the ægis of their broad and ample protection. In applying this principle to the case of the slave, however, I would not confer upon him the same rights which are possessed by his master; and, for the obvious reason, that he is not fitted to enjoy them. But I would place him under the supervision of laws made for his special benefit, and adapted to his new condition—laws which should essentially qualify the control of the master over him—laws which should protect him in all the rights which he is fitted to enjoy, and prepare him for the enjoyment of those to which it would be but a suicidal philanthropy immediately to admit him. Sir, we owe it to this degraded race of men to prepare them for freedom; to communicate to them moral and religious and literary instruction; to restore and protect the *domestic relations* among them; to teach them the duties which they owe to God, and to us, and to one another; and to build upon the foundation of a conscious responsibility to the government of Heaven and the authority of righteous human laws, a social structure which it shall be our glory to rear, and their highest earthly happiness to enjoy.

But, Mr. Speaker, while I thus repudiate the doctrine of the immediate and unqualified abolition of slavery, I maintain the duty of immediately and absolutely abolishing the *slave trade* within the limits of this District. And here I come to a part of the subject which gentlemen do not choose to approach, but manifestly desire to avoid. In this I commend their prudence. The slave trade is an evil for which they well know there is no defence, and no palliation. I regret, sir, that I have not the means of ascertaining its extent and character within this District. But the fact that I have no such means, furnishes a strong argument for referring the petitions to a select committee, raised for the purpose of going into a full investigation, and making a full report of the facts connected with this traffic. I can, at present, only say, I am well assured that the trade is actively carried on in the cities both of Washington and Alexandria,* especially in the latter, where is a large receptacle for the securing of slaves purchased in this District and the surrounding country; from which they are, from time to time, shipped to supply the markets in the Southern and Southwestern ports of the United States. I need not say that, what is usually connected with the slave trade elsewhere is connected with it here—the forced and final separation of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of husbands and

wives—the utter annihilation of all the endearing relations of human life, and the substitution of the single relation which *property* bears to its *absolute proprietor*.

Sir, shall this trade in human flesh be permitted to continue in the very heart of this Republic? Shall the law remain upon our statute book, which solemnly pronounces the citizen of the United States who is found engaged in the slave trade upon the high seas “a pirate,” and dooms him to “suffer death,” while here, in sight of this very Capitol, the same trade is carried on with impunity? Shall our citizens, who make merchandise of men upon the ocean, be hunted as outlaws, while here, the same offenders against the human race are suffered to pursue the guilty traffic unmolested? Sir, this subject demands a searching investigation. Will gentlemen deny such investigation? Shall the petitions which ask for it be “nailed to the table,” or “buried in the tomb of all the Capulets?” I trust they will not be thus disposed of, and that no fear of “excitement” will deter us from probing the subject to the bottom, and administering a prompt and effectual remedy.

I have, Mr. Speaker, spoken plainly and decidedly, because it is due to the people whom I have the honor to represent, that I should thus speak. It seems to me, sir, that the sentiments of the people of the North are not fairly understood here on this subject.

An honorable gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PIERCE) has said that not one in five hundred of his constituents were in favor of the object of these petitions; and other gentlemen have been understood to assert that the great mass of the northern people are opposed to any action of Congress upon the subject. To sustain this view of the matter, the resolutions of public meetings at the North, disapproving certain measures of the abolitionists, have been adverted to. I am well aware, sir, of the import of those resolutions, and think I understand something of the nature of that public sentiment which they indicate. And I must be permitted to say, that I believe gentlemen are much mistaken in supposing that they furnish evidence that the general sentiment at the North is opposed to the favorable action of Congress upon the memorials which are now on your table. No, sir; the meetings which adopted the resolutions in question were got up with no reference to this subject. What are the facts? The Southern country had been suddenly flooded from the North with anti-slavery publications; and Northern meetings were, thereupon, convened to disavow a participation in the obnoxious measure, and to express their disapprobation of it. This they did, indeed, in strong, decided language. But let not gentlemen mistake the import of all this. It was the measure to which I have alluded which brought into existence these meetings, and it was this against which their proceedings were mainly directed. The question of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in this District was not agitated. It is not so much as alluded to in the resolutions of the Philadelphia, New York, or Boston meetings; but the doctrine of immediate abolition, and the “extravagant proceedings” (to use the language of the New York resolutions) of the abolitionists, constitute the burden of them all.

Sir, there are very many of those who are disposed to press upon Congress the duty of granting the prayer of these petitions, who did not and do not approve the views and measures to which I have adverted; and it is due to frankness to say, sir, that I am among that number. I have never been able to perceive the expediency or propriety of attempting to inundate the South with even unexceptionable publications on this subject, much less those having a direct tendency to excite the passions of the slave, and tempt him to force the bondage which it is not for him to break, but for others to unloose. I admire, indeed, the purity of the philanthropy which seeks to abolish the institution of slavery, and elevate the degraded children of Africa from the condition of property to the privileges of men, but I deplore its often misdirected zeal, and deprecate the reaction which it is calculated to produce. The abolition of slavery in the States must be their own work. To convince them that the whole system is ruinous and wrong, is not the labor of a day or a year. All the questions connected with this subject are eminently practical questions, and nothing can be

* The following advertisements appear, daily, in the principal newspapers in this city:

“CASH FOR 200 NEGROES,

“Including both sexes, from twelve to twenty-five years of age. Persons having servants to dispose of, will find it to their interest to give me a call, as I will give higher prices, in cash, than any other purchaser who is now in this market. I can at all times be found at the Mechanics’ Hall, now kept by B. O. Sheekel, and formerly kept by Isaac Beers, on Seventh street, a few doors below Lloyd’s Tavern, opposite the Centre Market. All communications promptly attended to.

“JAMES BIRCH,
Washington City.”

“dec 4—dtf

“CASH FOR 500 NEGROES,

“Including both sexes, from twelve to twenty-five years of age. Persons having likely servants to dispose of, will find it to their interest to give us a call, as we will give higher prices in cash, than any other purchaser who is now, or may hereafter come into market.

“FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD.”

“Alexandria, April 6—d&sw.”

more obvious than the danger of failing to accomplish any thing by a premature effort to accomplish at once all that an ardent philanthropy may desire.

I have said that the public sentiment at the North is not understood on this subject. I believe, sir, it is greatly misunderstood. A large majority of the people are opposed to certain views and measures, connected with the proposed abolition of slavery in the States; but they entertain, at the same time, an irreconcilable aversion to the institution of slavery, in all its forms. The most conclusive evidence of this is furnished in all the proceedings at the North, which have been adverted to, in this debate, as an index of public sentiment there. Thus, the preamble to the Boston resolutions declares—"We hold this truth to be indisputable, that the condition of slavery finds no advocates among our citizens. Our laws do not authorize it; our principles revolt against it; our citizens will not tolerate its existence among them."

This, sir, expresses, I believe, the universal sentiment at the North on this subject. It is a sentiment which is not the production of a momentary excitement, but is deeply seated in the sober and settled convictions of the public mind. And, sir, let me assure gentlemen that no expressions of disapprobation in regard to the measures of "abolitionists," or doubts as to the practicability of *immediate* emancipation, are to be taken as evidence that the "principles" of the Northern people have ceased to "revolt against" slavery; or that they will not avail themselves of every suitable occasion to discuss it, as well as of all reasonable and constitutional means of remedying the evil. The slavery of the States they know they cannot reach, but by moral influence; and that influence they think can be made most effectual through kind and respectful, though earnest and urgent appeals to the Southern interest and the Southern conscience. But slavery *here*, they regard as within the competency of national legislation, and hold themselves, in common with the whole country, directly responsible for its continuance. And I need hardly say that there is a very general desire that measures may be immediately taken, looking to its final abolition; and especially that what has, by almost the whole civilized world, come to be accounted *piracy* upon the high seas, shall no longer be suffered to go unpunished and unmolested in the capital of this Republic.

The venerable member from Massachusetts (Mr. ADAMS) has said, and said truly, that opposition to slavery is, with the people of the North, a religious principle. An honorable gentleman from Virginia (Mr. JONES) replies, by asking, with emphasis, whether it is the religion of the Saviour of men? Sir, I did not expect to hear such a question seriously propounded here. I was not prepared for an intimation that that religion justified the holding of human beings as property. Why, sir, what is the great, leading, moral precept put forth by that Saviour, whose name is thus invoked to sanction the practice of slavery?

"ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO UNTO YOU, DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM."

Sir, I will attempt no commentary on this precept. It needs none. I will only say that it contains the seminal principle of the pure and elevated morality of the Christian system—a morality so congenial with the spirit, and so constantly enforced by the example of its Divine Author, while upon earth.

Now, sir, let gentlemen show me that Africans are not "men," and I will give up the argument. But, until this is done; until the declaration is blotted from the Book of Revelation, that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth;" and until this great truth ceases to find a response in every human bosom, shall slavery stand rebuked by this all-comprehensive and sublime precept of the Saviour of men.

But, sir, the religion which contains this precept, also enjoins submission to the "powers that be." The same mouth which uttered it said, "render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's"—a precept coincident with that which exhorts—"servants be obedient to your own masters; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity." The Saviour made it no part of his business, while upon earth, to subvert the existing order of things,

or to prescribe specific regulations for the administration of civil government. But he came to redeem men from sin—to write the law of LOVE upon their hearts—to establish principles and proclaim precepts, before whose searching and all-pervading influence the time-honored systems of injustice and oppression shall melt away.

Permit me now, Mr. Speaker, to examine, for a few moments, some of the objections which are urged against the legislation of Congress on this subject.

We are told, in the first place, that this is a question which concerns exclusively the people of this District; that the petitioners have no interest in it, and have no more right to ask Congress to abolish slavery here than they have to petition the Legislature of Virginia to abolish it within her limits.

Sir, the people who have signed these petitions regard themselves as citizens, not alone of the particular States in which they reside, but of the Republic. Every interest within the scope of the legislation of Congress is their interest. Every thing which concerns this Territory concerns them; its police; the value and security of the public property within its limits; and the safety of the Representative bodies annually assembled here. This is the growing capital of a great Republic. What may be the absolute or relative increase of its slave population, or how much it may affect the future condition of this District, cannot easily be foreseen. That population amounted, in 1830, to more than 6,000. The time may come when it will amount to ten times that number. And is it of no importance to our country whether its Capitol shall be surrounded by a mass of hardy, independent *freemen*, ready to peril their lives in defending it, as well as themselves, from the invasion of a foreign Power or whether it shall be guarded by 60,000 *slaves*, who, instead of rallying in its defence, may hail the invader as an angel of deliverance from their bondage? And is not this subject invested with additional interest, when it is considered that the Congress of the United States will be surrounded by such an amount of such a population? Have the petitioners, then, as a part of the American people, no interest in this question?

And then, too, there is the character of the country as it may be affected by the institutions within the Territory, where the legislative power of that country is supreme. Is slavery tolerated in this District? The petitioners feel themselves, in some sense, responsible for it. Is *merchandise* made of MEN, within sight of the Capitol in which their Representatives are assembled, and on whose summit wave the stripes and the stars of freedom? As Americans, they keenly feel the reproach, and instinctively reach forth their hands to wipe out the stain from the escutcheon of their country.

But, in the second place, it is asserted that Congress has no right to legislate on this subject; that, however great may be the evil of slavery or the slave trade within this District, it is an evil which must be borne, since authority to remedy it is not to be found among the powers granted in the Constitution.

And what are the powers of Congress touching this subject? Is it true that Congress is authorized to extend its legislation to the high seas, even to the very coast of Africa, and to prohibit the traffic in slaves, under the penalty of death, while it is powerless to reach the same evil in the very heart of the Republic? If the grant of powers must be so construed—if there is clearly no authority by which the Government can act in this matter, then must we submit to the evil, and wait an amendment of the Constitution, which shall make it consistent with itself, and save the country from reproach.

But, sir, fortunately for the country, the Constitution, through which we derive our powers, is not thus defective. The power to legislate upon this subject is granted; and that, not by remote implication, but in terms of obvious and familiar import. The 8th section of the first article gives to Congress authority "to exercise exclusive legislation, in all cases whatsoever, over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of Government of the United States."

In the first place, let it be observed, the power of Con-

gress to legislate in this District is *exclusive*. There is no other jurisdiction, either concurrent or conflicting. The jurisdiction of Virginia and Maryland, from which this territory was acquired by cession, is as perfectly excluded as is the authority and jurisdiction of the Emperor of all the Russias.

The *exclusive* character of the jurisdiction being apparent, the next question is, what is its *extent*? The answer is in the language of the grant, that it extends to "all cases whatsoever." The framers of the Constitution could have employed no language of more comprehensive import than this—"All cases whatsoever." But are there no limitations to this? Certainly. The grant is subject to the limitations which are incident to *all* legislative power. There are many things which no Legislature can rightfully do. It cannot pass an *ex post facto* law. It cannot, by a mere act of legislation, transfer the property of one individual to another. It cannot authorize the commission of crime. These, and such like limitations, exist in the *present* case; not because of any thing in the language of the grant, but because they are inherent in the very nature of *all* legislative power.

Now, will it be seriously contended that the abolition of slavery and the slave trade is embraced within these implied limitations of legislative power? Is it not within the competency of ordinary legislation? Have not slavery and the slave trade been abolished by many States of this Union; and that, not upon the ground, as has been suggested in debate, of *interest* merely, but because, when thoroughly examined, the pretended right to hold and transfer *men* as property has been found to rest on no substantial foundation? Indeed, the opposers of these petitions themselves, by laboring as they do to derive a prohibition to legislate on this subject from the Constitution, and from the reservations in the cessions of this territory, manifestly betray an unwillingness to trust the claim to exemption from congressional legislation to the *natural* limitation of legislative power.

It is said, indeed, by the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Wise) that the States which have abolished slavery "have not violated the great principle of vested rights, by taking slave property against the consent of the owners and without compensation;" but that they have merely "adopted the *post nati* principle, and declared that rights which did not exist at the time should never exist;" that is, that the issue of slaves, born after a certain future time, should be free. Without stopping to inquire into the correctness of this, in point of fact, but for the purposes of this argument, admitting it, let me ask what is the difference in principle between depriving an individual of his slave by act of legislation, and of the right to the issue of that slave by the same act? Upon common principles, an absolute right to the one as property necessarily carries with it a right to the other; and a farmer would resist as equal infringements of his rights, an attempt to take away his cattle, and a claim to deprive him of their future progeny.

It would be appropriate here to go into an examination of the right which is claimed to hold men as property, and of the rightful extent of legislation on this subject. But it opens too broad a field for the present discussion, and I will not enter it.

It thus appears that the right to legislate on the subjects of these petitions, which is manifestly included within the terms of the grant of power to Congress, is not excluded by operation of the principles which form the basis of ordinary exceptions to the power of legislation. What is there, then, to exclude from the sweeping grant of power to legislate "in all cases whatsoever," the power in question?

An honorable gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Wise) finds various grounds of implied exclusion in the Constitution. He says there are certain admitted exceptions to the legislative power of Congress in regard to this District, which he enumerates; and thereupon proceeds to infer, from the fact of these exceptions, that the power in question is also excepted.

Thus he says that Congress is prohibited by the Constitution from suspending the writ of *habeas corpus*, from passing a law respecting the establishment of religion, and

from abridging the freedom of speech and of the press, or the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, &c., and asks if these prohibitions do not extend to the power of Congress to legislate for this District. Most certainly they do; but it is for the obvious reason that they are unlimited in their terms, and of course necessarily extend to the whole legislation of Congress. Is there any such limitation of the power in question? Why, when the Convention was in the act of providing limitations to the powers which had been granted to Congress, in the 8th section of the first article of the Constitution, did they omit to limit specifically the power of legislation "in all cases whatsoever," which had been granted to Congress in reference to this District?

Again: The gentleman from Virginia says, if I rightly understand his argument, that the provision of the Constitution, that "the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States," necessarily extends to the District of Columbia, and that Congress must be understood to be prohibited from disfranchising here the citizens of the several States; that is, that it cannot deprive them of the privileges of citizens of the District whenever they come into it. It is true it cannot, because there would be a gross and glaring absurdity in securing, as the Constitution does, the rights of citizenship in each State, to citizens of every other State, and, at the same time, denying the rights of citizenship in this District—the common property of all the States—to the citizens of those States. And, besides, the very act of constituting this ten miles square a District of the United States necessarily gives to the citizens of each and all the States common rights in it; not the rights which they each enjoy in their respective States—as the terms in which the gentleman states his argument would seem to imply—because that would constitute twenty-four different rules of action, but the right of each resident and sojourner here, of being protected by the laws made for the District, and the whole District.

The exception, then, of a right to disfranchise a citizen of Virginia who may come here, rests upon a principle having no possible relation to the case in question.

But further. The gentleman from Virginia says that no person held to service or labor in a State, under the laws thereof, escaping into this District, can be discharged from such service or labor, but must be delivered up to the party to whom such service or labor may be due, and that this constitutes an exception from the general power to legislate "in all cases whatsoever" for this District. I admit it does, and why? Plainly because the Constitution having expressly secured the right to the slave-owner to reclaim his slave in any and every State of this Union, it would be a clear evasion of it, as well as a manifest absurdity to deny him that right, in a District which is the common property of the very States within which his right of reclamation is secured by the Constitution. The exception in this case rests, therefore, substantially upon an express provision of the Constitution, which, by no possibility of construction, can sustain the exception in question.

Again: The Constitution provides that "no tax or duty shall be laid on articles exported from any State. No preference shall be given by any regulation of commerce or revenue to the ports of one State over those of another; nor shall vessels bound to or from one State be obliged to enter, clear, or pay duties in another." And the gentleman from Virginia contends that this prohibition must be regarded as extending to the commerce and the ports of the District of Columbia; and if so, his inference is, that an implied prohibition of the abolition by Congress of slavery and the slave trade in the States must also be taken to extend to this District.

The first clause of the provision of the Constitution just referred to was designed to exempt the exports of the country from taxation, and must, of necessity, be taken to extend to all the ports within it; otherwise, the entire object of the clause might be directly defeated. The remaining clauses of the provision, it will be observed, have exclusive reference to the equality of privileges of the several States, which they aim to preserve, by prohibiting Congress from favoring the commerce, or the ports, or the navigation of

one, at the expense of another. This it might do, in effect, if the ports, and commerce, and navigation of this District might be exempted from the operation of the clauses in question. Thus, a preference of the port of Alexandria over that of Baltimore would disturb the equality of privilege which the Constitution intended to preserve between Virginia and Maryland.

But what has all this to do with the subject under discussion? The provisions with regard to commerce, &c. do not specifically reach it; and it is only, therefore, from the supposed analogy between the implied limitation of the power of Congress in the cases cited, and the limitation sought to be established in the present case, that an argument can be drawn in favor of the latter. But where is the analogy between an implied prohibition to abolish slavery in the States, and an express prohibition of a preference of the ports of one State over those of another State? There is, indeed, a prohibition in both cases, but here the analogy ceases. If this is sufficient to establish the position of gentlemen, let us see what other positions it may establish. Upon the same ground that Congress is prohibited from abolishing slavery in the State of Virginia, for example, is it also prohibited from forbidding in that State the sale of lottery tickets, and the practice of gambling, and the crime of kidnapping. But could it not have enacted a prohibition of these practices in the city of Alexandria the moment it was ceded to the United States? Could it not, in fact, have rendered valueless establishments for gaming, and receptacles for the kidnapped, which had been erected under the sanction of the laws of Virginia, if those laws had permitted such practices? Would the gentleman from Virginia have exclaimed against the invasion of vested rights, the taking of private property for public use, without compensation?

Again: The gentleman from Virginia says, the "local Legislature of this District cannot enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation, grant letters of marque and reprisal, coin money," &c., and infers, if I understand him, that because this disability results, as he supposes, by implication, from the inhibition to the States of the exercise of these powers, therefore the assumed disability of Congress to abolish slavery and the slave trade in this District may, in like manner, result from its want of power to put an end to these evils in the States.

The whole of this argument rests on a false supposition with regard to the source of the inability of Congress, as a Legislature for this District, to make treaties, grant letters of marque, and coin money; and falls to the ground when it is perceived that that inability results, not from the inhibition to the States of the exercise of such powers, but from their utter inconsistency with both the purposes for which the power to legislate over this District was granted, and the relation which the District evidently bears to the Union.

The gentleman from Virginia next proceeds to lay down the following general rules to restrain legislation over this District:

1. "That nothing which Congress is expressly prohibited by the Constitution from doing as a National Legislature, can it do as a Local Legislature for the District of Columbia."

2. "That all the duties and obligations which the States are bound by the Constitution to discharge and observe, from one to the other, the District of Columbia, or its Legislature, is bound to discharge and observe towards the States, respectively."

3. "That the Local Legislature of the District of Columbia can do no act, or pass no law, which the States are prohibited from doing or passing, by the Constitution."

And how, let it be asked, do these rules affect the present question? No express prohibition to legislate on the subject of State slavery is found in the Constitution, unless it be in the amendment which provides that "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the People." But if Congress cannot legislate on the subject of Slavery in this District, because the right to legislate upon it in the States is "reserved to the States," how is it to legislate for the District at all?

The subjects of every-day legislation for the District are subjects upon which Congress has no power to legislate for the States, and are, therefore, according to the gentleman's argument, subjects on which it has no right to legislate here.

And how does the gentleman's second rule touch this subject? Are the States bound, by their "duties and obligations" towards each other, to refrain from abolishing Slavery and the Slave trade within their respective limits? Nobody pretends this.

Many States have done it, and many more may yet do it, for any thing that can be found to the contrary in the Constitution. And can any greater evil result to any of the Slave States from the exercise of a power by Congress to abolish Slavery and the Slave trade within the limits of this District, than would result from the exercise, by the States, of their admitted power of doing the same thing within their limits? May not Maryland, for example, she chooses, put an end to these evils within her limit. And would not the exercise of the power be as dangerous to the peace of the South, as would be the exercise of the same power by Congress in regard to this District?

And has the gentleman's third rule a more appropriate application to the present question than either of the other two? To what purpose, in reference to this argument, is it to say that Congress can pass no law in reference to this District which the States are prohibited from passing? Are the States prohibited from passing laws abolishing Slavery and the Slave trade within their respective limits?

The gentleman from Virginia says, the Constitution declares that "private property shall not be taken for public use, without just compensation." Supposing this to have any application to the present case, it only involves the inquiry, whether slaves can be rightfully emancipated by legislative authority, without providing a just compensation to their masters. This touches a question which I will now discuss, namely: what is the foundation of the right to the slave, which is said to be vested in the master? Congress, however, are not asked to take private property for public use; but to free the African from the unnatural condition of being the property of another, to the end, not that he may become the property of the public, but the *proprietor of himself*. But this is not all that we are called on to do. We are asked to prohibit men from making merchandise of their fellow-men; from buying and selling them "to gain." Do gentlemen talk of a compensation to the slave-merchant for the loss of such a privilege? Do they even touch the subject of the Slave trade within this District? Dare they do it? Are there any "vested rights" in the way of legislation on this subject? Is there any question about "compensation" involved?—any limitation growing out of "the nature of society, and of government," to which the gentleman from Virginia refers?—any express or implied infringement of the rights of the States?—any kind of obstacle, in short, but the want of a will, in those who have the power, to put down this abominable traffic.

Having thus attempted to show that the power of Congress to legislate on the subjects of these petitions, obviously included in the power to "exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever," is not restrained by any natural limitations of legislative power, nor by any express or implied limitations to be found in the Constitution, the question arises—Where is the limitation to be found for which gentlemen so earnestly contend? I am answered—in the acts of cession, by which the States of Virginia and Maryland ceded the territory which forms this District to the United States. These acts, say gentlemen, are conclusive upon the subject. Let us see, then, if these States did, making the cessions, actually impose restrictions at variance with the plain language of the Constitution; and whether Congress accepted grants thus restricted.

The cession from Virginia was made by act of the Legislature of that State, on the 3d of December, 1789, the following words.*

"Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That a ter-

* The grant from Maryland was made on the 19th of December, 1791. It is in the same language as the grant from Virginia, and is limited by the same proviso.

of country, not exceeding ten miles square, or any lesser quantity, to be located within the limits of the State, and in any part thereof, as Congress may, by law, direct, shall be, and the same is hereby, forever ceded and relinquished to the Congress and Government of the United States, in full and absolute right, and exclusive jurisdiction, as well of soil as of persons residing or to reside thereon, pursuant to the tenor and effect of the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution of the Government of the United States."

This grant, it will be perceived, transfers to the United States "exclusive jurisdiction of soil and persons residing, or to reside thereon;" and adds, "pursuant to the tenor and effect of the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution of the Government of the United States;" that is, pursuant to that part of the Constitution which, as we have seen, expressly grants to Congress the power "to exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever." Here, then, instead of a restriction of the jurisdiction contemplated in the Constitution, there is, both in direct terms, and by reference to that instrument, an express and clear confirmation of it.

But, say gentlemen, there is a proviso which follows this grant, that contains the limitation contended for. Let us see. The proviso is as follows: "Provided that nothing herein contained shall be construed to vest in the United States any right of property in the soil, or to affect the rights of individuals therein, otherwise than the same shall or may be transferred by such individuals to the United States." Now, sir, is it not apparent, upon the slightest inspection of this proviso, that it limits the grant only so far as it extends to the soil, and was designed merely to protect the rights of individuals therein—that is, in the soil)—from the operation of that part of the cession which grants "the tract of country" to the United States "in full and absolute right?" It seems to me, indeed, that, so far from limiting the grant in reference to the subject-matter now under consideration, this very proviso does, in effect, confirm it; since an express exception of one species of right from the operation of the grant, and one only, would seem to imply an exclusion of all other exceptions. It is, indeed, altogether incredible, that the Legislatures of Virginia and Maryland should have intended to restrict the United States in their power over the subject of slavery, without using language which would directly, or by clear implication, reach the case.

The gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WISS) gives additional force to this argument by asking—"Why was the cession required? Why was their [the ceding States] consent to the purchase of places required by the Constitution, if it was not to give the States the power of imposing condition and restraint upon your legislation over the ceded territory?"

"The power of imposing condition and restraint!" Very well. If this was the purpose, the States of Virginia and Maryland of course understood it, and would take care to impose in their grants, all the conditions and restraints upon the legislation of Congress which they thought proper; and to do it so plainly that even the way-faring man need not err in regard to them. Now, where are the conditions and restraints on which gentlemen rely? I have recited the whole: and who will say that they embrace any restraint upon the power of Congress touching the subject under consideration? Is not the omission, upon the gentleman's own view of the subject, decisive of the question?

But the gentleman, having looked into the grant, and seeing that no such "condition and restraint" was imposed there, seeks to find it in "the nature of society and government in Maryland and Virginia;" which he says is "of itself, independent of conditions expressed in the acts of cession, sufficient to restrain your power of legislation over this subject." Thus, at one moment, a cession was provided for in the Constitution, to the end that the ceding States might impose condition and restraint upon the legislation of Congress; and, at the next, "the nature of society and government in Maryland and Virginia is of itself a sufficient restraint," without any thing expressed in the grant!

But, Mr. Speaker, what is the condition of the people of this District in regard to this important subject, if the power contended for is not granted to Congress? Maryland and Virginia, possessing the power to abolish slavery and the slave trade within their respective limits, had the power of doing it within the territory which now composes this District. But they possess it no longer. Their jurisdiction here is extinguished. The inhabitants of the territory are transferred to the United States, entirely divested of all civil jurisdiction; with no power to legislate on this or any other subject, but subjected to the "exclusive legislation" of Congress in "all cases whatsoever." However much they may, at any time, desire to free the territory from the curse of slavery and the slave trade, they are powerless. For any thing that they can do, by the force of law, they and their children, and their children's children, to the latest time, must be doomed to see among them a traffic which makes merchandise of the bodies and the souls of their fellow-men; which marches through their streets, chained together, companies of human beings destined to the slave prison and the slave ship; and which agonizes their moral sensibilities by a severance of all the ties which bind man to his fellow-man, in the most valued and endeared relations of human life.

I have thus shown that the power given to Congress over this subject, by the general grant in the Constitution, is affected, neither by the natural limitations to the exercise of legislative power, nor by any limitation, express or implied, in the constitution itself, nor by any contained in the cessions of this territory by the States of Maryland and Virginia.

But the petitioners are here met with another objection to granting the prayer of these petitions. It is made a question of public safety. To begin the work of abolishing slavery, and to banish the detestable traffic in human flesh from this District, will, we are told, tend to excite a spirit of insurrection in the Southern States; and gentlemen give full rein to their imaginations in depicting the horrors of rape, rapine, and murder which will follow. I do not permit myself to doubt the perfect sincerity of gentlemen in these gloomy forebodings. I know they are in a position to see what I cannot see, and feel what I cannot feel. I will not allow myself to trifle with their views or feelings on this subject, though I must be permitted to doubt the correctness of the one, and the justness of the other.

And may I not well doubt? It is true I do not profess a very familiar acquaintance with the disposition of the slave population, or the probable influence upon them of a discussion of, and action upon, this subject. And while I would hesitate to oppose my own individual opinion to the assertions of honorable gentlemen, so confidently made, they must permit me to confront them, not altogether with my own opinions, but with the authority of intelligent and respectable slaveholders themselves.

I hold in my hand a petition presented to this House in the year 1828, signed by more than eleven hundred citizens of this District, praying for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade within its limits. It was referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia, and remained unacted on until the last session, when it was called up, on motion of an honorable member from New Hampshire, (Mr. HUBBARD,) and ordered to be printed, with the names of the signers. I send it to the Chair, and ask that it may be read by the Clerk.

Here Mr. GARLAND, of Virginia, interposed, and said he should object to the reading of that and all other petitions on the subject, unless the gentleman used it as a part of his argument.

Mr. SLADE replied that he intended so to use it, and should read it himself, but, being exhausted, he wished it read by the Clerk.

Mr. GARLAND withdrew his objection, and consented to the reading, as an act of courtesy to Mr. S.

The petition was then read by the Clerk, as follows:

"To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

"We, the undersigned, citizens of the counties of Washington and Alexandria, in the District of Columbia, beg leave to call the

attention of your honorable body to an evil of serious magnitude, which greatly impairs the prosperity and happiness of this District, and casts the reproach of inconsistency upon the free institutions established among us.

"While the laws of the United States denounce the foreign slave trade as piracy, and punish with death those who are found engaged in its perpetration, there exists in this District, the seat of the National Government, a domestic slave trade scarcely less disgraceful in its character, and even more demoralizing in its influence. For this is not, like the former, carried on against a barbarous nation; its victims are reared up among the people of this country, educated in the precepts of the same religion, and imbued with similar domestic attachments.

"These people are, without their consent, torn from their homes; husband and wife are frequently separated and sold into distant parts; children are taken from their parents, without regard to the ties of nature; and the most endearing bonds of affection are broken forever.

"Nor is this traffic confined to those who are legally slaves for life. Some who are entitled to freedom, and many who have a limited time to serve, are sold into unconditional slavery; and, owing to the defectiveness of our laws, they are generally carried out of the District before the necessary steps can be taken away for their release.

"We behold these scenes continually taking place among us, and lament our inability to prevent them. The people of this District have, within themselves, no means of legislative redress; and we therefore appeal to your honorable body, as the only one invested by the American Constitution with the power to relieve us.

"Nor is it only from the rapacity of slave traders that the colored race in this District are doomed to suffer. Even the laws which govern us sanction and direct, in certain cases, a procedure that we believe as unparalleled, in glaring injustice, by any thing at present known among the Governments of Christendom. An instance of the operation of these laws, which occurred during the last summer, we will briefly relate:

"A colored man, who stated that he was entitled to freedom, was taken up as a runaway slave, and lodged in the jail of Washington City. He was advertised, but no one appearing to claim him, he was, according to law, put up at public auction for the payment of his jail fees, and sold as a slave for life! He was purchased by a slave trader, who was not required to give security for his remaining in the District, and he was, soon after, shipped at Alexandria for one of the Southern States. An attempt was made by some benevolent individuals to have the sale postponed until his claim to freedom could be investigated; but their efforts were unavailing; and thus was a human being sold into perpetual bondage at the capital of the freest Government on earth, without even a pretence of trial, or an allegation of crime.

"We blush for our country while we relate this disgraceful transaction, and we would fain conceal it from the world, did not its very enormity inspire us with the hope that it will rouse the philanthropist and the patriot to exertion. We have no hesitation in believing your honorable body never intended that this odious law should be enforced; it was adopted with the old code of Maryland, from which, we believe, it has been expunged since the District was ceded to the General Government.

"The fact of its having been so recently executed, shows the necessity of this subject being investigated by a power which we confidently hope will be ready to correct it.

"We are aware of the difficulties that would attend any attempt to relieve us from these grievances by a sudden emancipation of the slaves in this District, and we would, therefore, be far from recommending so rash a measure. But the course pursued by many of the States of this Confederacy, that have happily succeeded in relieving themselves from a similar burden, together with the bright example which has been set us by the South American republics, proves, most conclusively, that a course of gradual emancipation, to commence at some fixed period, and to take effect only upon those who may thereafter be born or removed into the District, might be pursued without detriment to the present proprietors, and would greatly redound to the prosperity and honor of our country.

"The existence among us of a distinct class of people, who, by their condition as slaves, are deprived of almost every incentive to virtue and industry, and shut out from many of the sources of light and knowledge, has an evident tendency to corrupt the morals of the people, and to damp the spirit of enterprise, by accustoming the rising generation to look with contempt upon honest labor, and to depend for support too much upon the labor of others. It prevents a useful and industrious class of people from settling among us, by rendering the means of subsistence more precarious to the laboring class of whites.

"It diminishes the resources of the community, by throwing

the earnings of the poor into the coffers of the rich; thus rendering the former dependent, servile, and improvident; while the latter are tempted to become, in the same proportion, luxurious and prodigal.

"That these disastrous results flow from the existence of slavery among us, is sufficiently conspicuous, when we contrast the languishing condition of this District, and the surrounding country, with the prosperity of those parts of the Union which are less favored in point of climate and location, but blessed with a free and industrious population.

"We would, therefore, respectfully pray that these grievances may claim the attention of your honorable body, and that a law of Congress may be enacted, declaring that all children of slaves, born in the District of Columbia after the fourth day of July, eighteen hundred and twenty-eight, shall be free at the age of twenty-five years, and that those laws, which authorize the selling of supposed runaways for their prison fees or maintenance, may be repealed.

"And, also, that laws may be enacted to prevent slaves from being removed into this District, or brought in for sale, hire, or transportation; without, however, preventing members of Congress, resident strangers, or travellers, from bringing and taking away with them their domestic servants."

Mr. PATTON inquired whether the gentleman from Vermont could inform him how many of the signers were slave-holders.

Mr. GARLAND made a further inquiry whether the gentleman from Vermont knew if they were all inhabitants of the District.

Mr. SLADE replied, he could not inform the gentleman how many of the signers were slaveholders. He personally knew some of them, and knew them to be owners of slaves. The list of names, some of which he read, embraced men of all the professions and employments, — lawyers, physicians, merchants,

As to the question, said Mr. PATTON, whether they were inhabitants of this District, I can only say that I have seen the names of some of them in the House seven years ago, and have since seen them in the Clerk's office ever since, open to the public, and that it has been, during the past year, among the published documents of this House; and, moreover, that it purports on its face to be a petition of inhabitants of this District. Under these circumstances, I submit whether there is not a sufficient presumption that it is what it purports to be, to put gentlemen upon proof of the contrary.

And now, Mr. Speaker, let me entreat gentlemen to look into this petition. I do this the more earnestly, because they will find the names of many there, whom, I am persuaded, they will not be inclined to charge either with ignorance or fanaticism; but on whose truth and intelligence and judgment they will place the most confident reliance. They state facts which they are in a condition to know, and advance opinions, the soundness of which is not liable to be affected by "northern prejudices" on this subject. They are in the midst of slavery, and understand what it is. They have witnessed the slave trade, and know something of its horrors: and without any of the doubts of gentlemen in regard to the power of Congress on this subject, and without any of the apprehensions with regard to the effect of its discussion upon the public peace and safety, which has been made the subject of such glowing descriptions and gloomy anticipations, here and elsewhere, they fearlessly announce the truth in regard both to slavery and the slave trade, and urgently appeal to Congress "as the only body invested by the American Constitution with power to relieve them."

I submit, Mr. Speaker, whether it is not time that these petitioners, sustained as they are by the concurrent supplications of their Northern brethren, should be heard and regarded; and whether the fact that eleven hundred citizens of this District have signed the petition which has just been read, is not a sufficient reply to the argument which has been drawn from considerations connected with a regard to the public safety.

But further: The subject of the abolition of slavery, it is well known, was fully debated in the Legislature of Virginia in the year 1832, when the "injustice, tyranny, and oppression" of the slave system were openly and

boldly maintained;* and an effort was seriously made to commence a system of abolition which should look to the final, and not distant, extinction of slavery in that State. And did that discussion produce any symptoms of insurrection among the slaves? No, Sir. And why, indeed, should it? If you, sir, were the owner of one hundred slaves, and should seriously set about measures to give them the boon of freedom, do you think that the first intimation of it would beget in them a spirit of rebellion, and that it would rise in proportion as you should advance your benevolent plans towards their consummation? To suppose this, is to suppose what I want evidence to believe of the African race—that they are so lost to gratitude as to find no inducement to its exercise in such a manifestation of benevolent regard for them as this.

Suffer me, sir, to dwell a few moments longer on the indications of opinion in Virginia on this subject, pending the agitation of the question in the Legislature of that State. While the subject was before a committee of the Legislature, the Editor of the Richmond Enquirer, a well known leading public journal at the Seat of Government of Virginia, said:

"It is probable, from what we hear, that the committee on the colored population will report some plan for getting rid of the free people of color. But is this all that can be done? Are we forever to suffer the greatest evil which can scourge our land not only to remain, but to increase in its dimensions? 'We may shut our eyes and avert our faces, if we please,' (writes an eloquent South Carolinian, on his return from the North a few weeks ago,) 'but there it is, the dark and growing evil, at our doors; and meet the question we must at no distant day. God only knows what it is the part of wise men to do on that momentous and appalling subject. Of this I am very sure, that the difference—nothing short of frightful—between all that exists on one side of the Potomac, and all on the other, is owing to that cause alone. The disease is deep seated; it is at the heart's core; it is consuming, and has all along been consuming our vitals, and I could laugh, if I could laugh on such a subject, at the ignorance and folly of the politician who ascribes that to an act of the Government, which is the inevitable effect of the eternal laws of nature. What is to be done? Oh! my God, I don't know, but something must be done.'

Yes, something must be done; and it is the part of no honest man to deny it; of no free press to affect to conceal it. When this dark population is growing upon us; when every new census is but gathering its appalling numbers upon us; when within a period equal to that in which this federal constitution has been in existence, those numbers will increase to more than 2,000,000 within Virginia; when our sister States are closing their doors upon our blacks for sale; and when our whites are moving westwardly in greater numbers than we like to hear of; when this, the fairest land on all this continent, for soil and climate and situation combined, might become a sort of garden spot if it were worked by the hands of white men alone, *can we, ought we* to sit quietly down, fold our arms, and say to each other, 'well, well, this thing will not come to the worst in our day. We will leave it to our children and our grand-children and great-grand-children to take care of themselves, and to brave the storm?' Is this to act like wise men? Heaven knows we are no fanatics. We detest the madness which actuated the *Amis des Noirs*. But something ought to be done. Means sure, but gradual, systematic but discreet, ought to be adopted for reducing the mass of evil which is pressing upon the South, and will still more press upon her the longer it is put off. We ought not to shut our eyes nor avert our faces. And though we speak almost without a hope, that the committee or the Legislature will do any thing, at the present session, to meet this question, yet we say now, in the utmost sincerity of our hearts, that our wisest men cannot give

too much of their attention to this subject, nor can they give it too soon."

The hon. gentleman from Virginia will suffer me to commend this expression of sentiment to the deliberate attention which the high standing and responsible position of its author, and the peculiar circumstances under which he wrote, eminently entitle it. Especially would I commend to the hon. gentleman from South Carolina the declaration of the "eloquent South Carolinian," embodied in the article I have just read. The able Editor of the Richmond Enquirer, and his eloquent correspondent, both had a near view of the evils of slavery, and describe them in a language which at once attests their sincerity, and commands assent to the correctness of their views upon this "momentous and appalling subject."

I will add, that the other leading paper at the capital of Virginia, the Richmond Whig, made about the same time the following declaration:

"We affirm, that the great mass of Virginia herself triumphs that the slavery question has been agitated, and reckons it glorious that the spirit of her sons did not shrink from grappling with the monster. We affirm that, in the heaviest slave districts of the State, thousands have hailed the discussion with delight, and contemplate the distant but ardently desired result, as the supreme good which a benevolent Providence could vouchsafe to their country."

Mr. Speaker, if it was "glorious" and safe for Virginia to "grapple with the monster" in 1832, is it inglorious and unsafe for the Congress of the United States to grapple with the same monster now?

Suffer me, Mr. Speaker, to present one more expression of opinion on this subject. I leave Virginia, and go over the mountains into the valley of the Mississippi; and I there find the following recent resolution of the Synod of Kentucky upon the subject of emancipation:

"Resolved, That a committee of ten be appointed, to consist of an equal number of ministers and elders, whose business it shall be to digest and prepare a plan for the moral and religious instruction of our slaves, and for their future emancipation, and to report such plan to the several presbyteries within our bounds, for their consideration and approval."

The committee appointed under this resolution, of whom JOHN BROWN, Esq. was chairman, and the Rev. JOHN C. YOUNG, President of Danville College, Secretary, made a report, in which, among other things, they say:

"1. A part of our system of slavery consists in depriving human beings of the right to acquire property. 2. The deprivation of personal liberty forms another part of our system of slavery. 3. The deprivation of personal security is the remaining constituent of our system of slavery." Its effects are said to be: "1. To deprave and degrade its subjects, by removing from them the strongest natural checks to human corruption. 2. It dooms thousands of human beings to hopeless ignorance. 3. It deprives its subjects, in a great measure, of the privileges of the gospel. 4. This system licenses and produces great cruelty. 5. It produces general licentiousness among the slaves. 6. This system demoralizes the whites as well as the blacks. 7. This system draws down upon us the vengeance of Heaven." These several points, in their order, are illustrated and enforced at length. Then follow confutations of the various arguments of the defenders of the system. Then—

"As the conclusion of all that has been advanced, we assert it to be the unquestionable duty of every Christian to use vigorous and immediate measures for the destruction of this whole system, and for the removal of all its unhappy effects. Both these objects should be contemplated in his efforts."

Mr. Speaker, is it regarded by good and intelligent men in Kentucky as safe openly to recommend a "destruction of the whole system of slavery?" and shall we be quailing before the dangers of doing it in the District of Columbia?

But, sir, I have another authority on this subject. I return from the Valley of the Mississippi to this District, and, looking into the United States Telegraph of the 4th of September last, I find the following: Speaking in the name of the Southern people, the Editor says:

"We hold that our sole reliance is on ourselves: that we have most to fear from the gradual operation on public opinion among ourselves, and that those are the most insidious and dangerous invaders of our rights and interests,

* The gentleman who opened the debate on the side of abolition, said: "It was a truth held sacred by every American and by every Republican throughout the world, and he presumed it could not be denied in that Hall, as a general principle, that it is an act of injustice, tyranny, and oppression, to hold any part of the human race in bondage against their consent. That circumstances may exist which may put it out of the power of the owners, for a time, to grant their slaves liberty, he admitted to be possible; and if they do exist in any case, it may excuse, but not justify, the owner in holding them. The right to the enjoyment of liberty is one of the most precious, inherent, inalienable rights which pertain to the whole human race, and of which they can never be divested, except by an act of gross injustice."

who, coming to us in the guise of friendship, endeavor to persuade us that slavery is a sin, a curse, an evil. It is not true that the South sleeps on a volcano—that we are afraid to go to bed at night—that we are fearful of murder and pillage. Our greatest cause of apprehension is, from the operation of the morbid sensibility which appeals to the consciences of our own people, and would make them the voluntary instruments of their own ruin.”

So, then, the fears are not of insurrection, but of *coercion*—not of the physical force of the slaves, but of the power of “*public opinion*!”

Need I, Mr. Speaker, repeat the expression of my sincere conviction, that the fears expressed by gentlemen on this floor are groundless? And is it not apparent, that the true ground of fear on this subject is to be found in a continuance of the “dark and growing evil,” so well described by the “eloquent South Carolinian,” to which our attention has been directed? Permit me to add, in the language of the Richmond Enquirer, in the article I have read, that “our wisest men cannot give too much attention to this subject, nor can they give it too soon.”

But there is another objection sometimes urged against legislating on the subject of slavery, which must not be overlooked in this discussion. Every attempt to disturb the existing relation of master and slave, it is said, tends to disturb the balance of the Constitution, inasmuch as it was among the compromises which entered into the formation of that instrument, that three-fifths of the slaves should be represented in this body.

Now, sir, in the first place, let it be observed that we are not asked to legislate on the abolition of slavery in Virginia or South Carolina, but in the District of Columbia; and that our legislation disturbs the balance of the Constitution only by the influence of its example upon the slaveholding States.

In the second place, I contend that a just exercise of all the powers granted in the Constitution can never disturb its true balance, but is itself the preservation of that balance.

If the Constitution authorizes Congress to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, and the tendency of the exercise of that power should be to abolish Slavery in the Slave States, and thus reduce their representation in this body, it is a constitutional result, of which no State has a right to complain. As well might we complain of the abolition of Slavery in the West India Islands by Great Britain, because its tendency is to produce the same result in the United States. Neither Congress, in the one case, nor Great Britain, in the other, is under any responsibility for the consequences of a rightful exercise of power—I mean, a responsibility to the Constitution in the one case, and the Law of Nations in the other.

But, sir, the balance of the Constitution is already disturbed, in the other direction. When the Constitution was adopted, the Mississippi on the west, and Florida on the south, formed the limits of the Confederate Republic. For any thing contemplated in the Constitution, these boundaries formed impassable limits, beyond which a slave population could not bring into Congress a representation upon that basis. The purchases of Louisiana and

Florida have added two additional slave States, and will, probably, ere long, add two more. And do gentlemen reflect how much this has disturbed the balance of the Constitution?

But this is not all. The balance, in point of fact, has been disturbed, and must be more so, by the great relative increase of the slave population of the South, and the diminution, almost the extinction, of it at the North. And although this is not, of course, an unconstitutional increase, yet it is obvious that the enormous and alarming relative increase of the slave population, compared with that of the whites, was not within the contemplation of the men who formed the Constitution.

Thus, in the four Atlantic States south of the Potomac, the increase of the whites from 1790 to 1830 was 84 per cent.; while that of the slaves was, during the same period, 136 per cent. In South Carolina the disproportion was still greater; the increase of the whites, during the same period, having been 94 per cent., while that of the slaves was 194 per cent.

To what results, Mr. Speaker, are the principles which produce such a disproportionate increase of population, to lead us? What will, in the progress of fifty years, become of the balance of the Constitution? These are questions which deeply concern the free States.

But there is another question which comes home to the slave States with tremendous and appalling interest. What will be their condition half a century hence, in reference to this subject? That period will roll away; and the principles which govern the advance of the slave population will continue to operate! And yet gentlemen say, “hands off”—let us alone. “We will leave it to our children, and our grand-children, and our great grand-children, to take care of themselves, and to brave the storm!”

But, sir, I will pursue this train of thought, and leave it, and with it, the subject which I kindly indulged me in discussing.

Deeply convinced, sir, that the petition to ask us to abolish slavery and the slave District, and that we have not only the right, but our bounden duty forthwith to commence the one, and to begin and finish the other, I must ask, when the proper time shall come, that the petitions shall be referred to a select committee, to the end that they may have the speedy and decisive action of this body. It seems to be due to the great importance of the subject that they should be thus disposed of. Sir, we must not bury these petitions. And let me say to gentlemen, that such a policy will certainly defeat itself. You cannot smother investigation of this subject. Sir, the spirit of free inquiry is the master spirit of the age. It bows to the authority of truth and reason and Revelation; but it bows to nothing else. It must have free course, and it will have it; giving life and soul and energy to the march of liberal principles, and destined to shake every institution on earth which does not recognise the “inalienable rights” of man, and bow to the supremacy of just and equal laws. And, sir, it shall move onward, and onward, and onward, until every kindred and tongue of people under Heaven shall acknowledge and glory in great truth that “ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.”

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